I told her that the sentence was not bad; four years was the least I had anticipated. She again urged me to take care of my health, reminding me that we had tuberculosis in the family.

All convicts sentenced to forced labor had to be examined medically by a special commission before they were shackled for the first third of their term. With others, I was called to the office. The commissioners sat behind a long table: a stout, kindly-looking bespectacled man in the middle; an official of the Justice Department; a middle-aged officer with a bored expression on his face; the prison doctor and the superintendent. The doctor examined those who complained of some serious illness. Prisoners in very poor shape could be excused from wearing fetters.

When Fetisov called my name, the chairman turned to him and said in a half whisper, "A writer, from a good family, well known in St. Petersburg." Then he turned to the prison doctor and said, "Rheumatic fever, I presume?"

"Yes, Your Excellency," nodded the doctor. "The prisoner has been under my observation. Rheumatic fever."

I interrupted him. "That is not true. I have never been under your observation and do not have rheumatic fever or any other disease."

The doctor replied with irritation, "I keep a record of each cell, and I am supposed to be able to recognize rheumatic fever when I see it."

The chairman looked at me intently and waived my objection: "All right, all right, have it your way, you have no rheumatic fever. But the commission must rely on the official report of the physician, rather than trust the prisoner's word." And he ordered the superintendent to write: "Fit for labor but without shackles." Later I learned that the chairman was a new inspector of penal institutions in Ekaterinoslav and had conducted the investigation of the mistreatment of prisoners. He knew I had written the report and was paying me a literary honor.

ILLNESS

Actually, I was not as healthy as I pretended to be. My physical condition had deteriorated as a result of undernourishment and lack of fresh air. Boils broke out on my legs and arms, but others in the tower were in worse shape, Misha alarmingly so. He was coughing blood, but when I persuaded him to report to the pharmacy the prison doctor threw him out as a chiseler. I took his bloodstained handkerchiefs, went to the doctor, and reported Misha's symptoms